

# Sixth Century

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## STESICHORUS

### *The Funeral Games for Pelias*

178    Hermes gave Castor the steeds  
        Phlogeos and Harpagus, the swift foals of Podarga,  
        and Hera gave Xanthus and Cyllarus.

179a (*Gifts for a girl*)  
        sesame-cakes and spelt, sweetflan and other bakes  
        and yellow honey.

179b    Amphiaraus won the long jump,  
        Meleager the javelin.

### *The Song of Geryon\**

S 14    [None of the gods] remained by Zeus  
        the lord of all.

        Then did pale-eyed Athena  
        speak to her stern-hearted uncle  
        Poseidon, god of horse-ways:  
        'Remember the promise you made,  
        [and do not seek to save] Geryones from death.'

184 (S 7)  
        . . . his cowherd Eurytion, born of . . .  
        on the mainland, across from famed Erythea,  
        by the boundless silver-veined waters of Tarshish  
        river\*  
        in a cave in the rock.

S 8    Over the waves of the salty deep they came  
        to the beautiful Isle of the Gods,  
        where the Hesperides have their golden houses.



S 13 (*Geryones' parents appeal to him not to fight Heracles*)

' . . . my unhappy motherhood, unhappy fate.

Now I beg you, Geryones,  
if ever I gave you my nipple

. . . . .

[She drew apart her fragr]ant robe . . .

S 11

[With these words he] reached out . . .

He spoke in answe[er, the powerful son]

[of im]mortal [Chrysaor and Callirhoe:]

'Do not try to frighten me

[by speaking of icy de]ath,

and do not . . .

Perhaps my [lineage makes me immortal, un]aging,

[fit to live] in Olympus:

if so, better [to fight and avoid] reproach

[than to look on while the cattle]

[are pl]undered from my [stalls.]

Or if, dea[r father, all that's left]

[for me is] carrying on into old age

as one of those who live fr[om day to day,]

[cut off fr]om the blessed gods,

then now's the finest time to face my destiny

[and save you] and all our kin

from disgrace with men of the future [who tell]

of the son of Chrysaor—

may that not be the choice of the blessed gods.

. . . fight for my cattle . . .'

S 15

. . . debated in his mind

. . . to be best by far

to . . . and fight by stealth

against an enemy of such great might.

. . . he planned

a bitter end for him.

. . . held his shield before

. . . and from his head

. . . the horsehair plume

. . . upon the ground.

(13 lines lost)



(Heracles' arrow) bearing on its head  
 a charge of horrid death,  
 being besmeared with blood and . . . gall,  
 the torments of the deadly Hydra's darting heads.  
 In silent stealth he drove it in his brow,  
 cleaving the flesh and bones  
 by fortune's dispensation.  
 Straight through to his skull-top the shaft kept  
     course,  
 and spoiled with crimson blood  
 his cuirass and his gory limbs.  
 Geryones bent his neck aslant  
 even as a poppy whose delicate structure  
 decays, and its petals soon fall.

185 (S 17)

As the mighty Sun-god stepped into his bowl  
 of gold, to cross the river of World's End  
 to the holy deeps of Night  
 to his mother, his wedded wife, his dear children,  
 the son of Zeus took his way\*  
 into the laurel-shaded grove.

181 (S 19)

Then Heracles took the goblet, a three-flagon  
     measure,  
 that Pholos\* had mixed and served him,  
 and drank with application.

### *Helen*

187 They showered quinces on the king's wedding car,  
 they showered myrtle leaves,  
 rose-garlands, crinkled wreaths of violet.

188 A silverstone foot-basin.

### *Palinodes\**

193(a) Hither once more, song-loving goddess.

193(b) Gold-wingèd virgin Muse . . .

192 This tale they tell's not true:  
 you did not sail in those benched ships  
 or come to the towers of Troy.



*Eriphyle\**

S 148 The warrior Adrastus  
addressed him chidingly:  
'Alcmaeon, whither away, leaving the banqueters  
and this most excellent minstrel? Why  
have you risen from your place?'

So he spoke, and the War-god's favourite,  
Amphiaraus' son, replied:

'You stay, friend, drink, and keep your heart  
cheerful in feasting; but I've a task

. . . . .'

and . . . how his mother  
harnessed a mule-cart and set off to Sicyon  
to seek a bride for him,

. . . Anaxandros' daughter, of the line  
of haughty . . .

*The Sack of Troy*

S 88 'To the temple, the citadel, hasten,  
you Trojans and allied contingents,  
come, let us not be persuaded to . . .  
. . . uncouthly disfigure this . . . horse,  
the goddess's holy adornment:  
let us beware the Lady's heavy wrath,

. . . . .'

So he spoke, and the Trojans . . .  
considered how . . .  
the great horse . . .

S 89 'But now by the waters of [fair-flowing] Simoïs  
we have been sorely befooled by a man  
who by the grace of the goddess, august Athena,  
knows the measures and skill . . .  
[Trickery] instead of battle  
and combat [will have] the great glory of  
bringing  
on Troy of the broad dancing-places  
its day of captivity.'



S 105 . . . the Danaans eagerly sprang from the horse  
 . . . Poseidon the holy earth-rider [sent  
 tremors (?);]  
 Apollo [abided no longer in] holy [Ilios,]  
 nor Artemis, nor Aphrodite  
 . . . the Trojans' city Zeus . . .  
 . . . Trojans . . .

## Returns of the Heroes

209\* The lady Helen  
[cried out] at the sudden sight of the heavenly  
sign,  
and these were her words to Odysseus' son:  
'Telemachus, this is surely some messenger from  
on high,  
flown down through the fathomless air and gone  
screeching away with the voice of killing death.  
Even thus will Odysseus appear in your house  
. . . by the will of Athena.  
[But if you thin]k "this is but a chattering crow",  
[set off for ho]me, I will not hold you here.  
Penelope [will rejoice] to see you,  
son of the man she loves.'

## The Orestes saga

210 Join me, Muse, in rejecting stories of battle,  
and celebrate weddings of gods and banquets of  
men  
and feasts of the blessed.

211 when the swallow in springtime rings out.

212 Such are the lovely-haired Graces' gifts to the  
public  
that we must sing, devising an elegant Phrygian  
melody,  
at the arrival of spring.

217 (*Apollo to Orestes*)

'I will give you this bow,\*  
informed by all my arts,  
for victory in shooting.'



- 219\* She dreamed a serpent came, with a bloody wound  
on the crown of its head; and out of that  
appeared a king of Pleisthenes' line.

*The Hunters of the Boar\**

221 and buried its snout's tip beneath the ground.

222 . . . the sons of Thestios.

[Five of] the youngest, their parents' darlings,  
[remained] at home, but the brave,  
fleet-footed Procaon and Clytius went.

From Larisa came Eurytion,  
the son of long-robed . . .

and the fierce son of Elatus

. . . .

On one side sat the Locrian spearsmen

. . . the dear sons of . . .

trusty Achaeans . . . and proud . . .

and those who dwelt in Boeotia's holy acres;

while on the other side the Dryopes

and steadfast Aetolians . . .

*The Sons of Oedipus\**

222b (*Jocasta speaking*)

'Do not add to my woes the burden of worry,  
or raise grim prospects for my future life.

For the immortal gods  
have not ordained for men on this holy earth  
unchanging enmity for all their days,  
no more than changeless love;  
they set men's outlook for the day.

As to your prophecies, I pray the lord Apollo  
will not fulfil them all;

but if I am destined to see  
my sons slain by each other, if the Fates  
have so dispensed, then may  
death's ghastly close be mine straightway  
before I can ever behold  
the terrible moaning and tears of such woes,



my sons killed in the house  
or the city fallen.

But come, dear sons, and hearken to my words.  
Here's how I declare the outcome for you:  
one to have the palace and live  
by [the streams of Dirce], the other  
to go hence, taking all your dear father's gold  
and property—whichever of you two  
draws the first lot by Destiny's design.

This, I think, should prove  
the way to free you from an evil fate  
as this godly seer foretells,  
if truly Kronos' son [is to preserve]  
King Cadmus' people and city, and put off  
to later times whatever ill  
is fated for our clan.'

So spoke the lady with appeasing words,  
seeking to check her sons from combat in the  
house,  
and the seer Teiresias supported her.  
They agreed to do . . .

(38 lines fragmentary)

. . . cattle and horses  
. . . portion.  
. . . what is destined to happen.  
[Make your way to the hous]e of King Adrastus;  
he will receive you, and give his lovely daughter  
. . . and his people will give . . .'

(12 lines fragmentary)

So spoke the famous [Teiresias], and at once  
the hero  
departed from the house.  
[The finest captains] of Thebes [escorted]  
Polynices their friend.  
He went upon his way, passed through the mighty  
wall  
. . . with him . . .



[By the gods'] guidance they reached the Isthmus,  
the sea-[god's . . . with pr]ayers;

Then [they passed] Corinth's fair settlements,  
and soon they came to [well-built] Cleonae.

### From unidentified poems

223                    because Tyndareos once,  
when making sacrifice to all the gods,  
forgot but one—the Cyprian who bestows  
such amiable blessings. She in wrath  
made his daughters twice- and thrice-marriers,  
deserters of their men.\*

232                    Truly, above all  
Apollo loves amusement, song and dance;  
grief and lament are Hades' affair.

233                    Shining in armour the new-born Pallas sprang  
on to the broad earth.

235                    Poseidon, the commander  
of hollow-hoof horses.

240                    Come, hither, Calliope pure of voice.

243                    And the slim javelins  
they hurled also.

244                    For it is fruitless, it is helplessness,  
to weep for the dead.

245                    When a man is dead,  
all favour he enjoyed is gone for nought.

250                    O Muse who startest the dance . . .

P. Oxy. 3876 fr. 4

. . . and addressed her:

'Noble daughter of [Thestios,]\*

it is no enviable news

you are about to receive in your halls.

This day your brothers are untimely dead,

slain by [your own dear son,]

the doughty [Meleager.']



Ibid. fr. 61-2

[They] ba[thed his body well]  
[in warm water, and anointed it]  
with unguent of nectar fragrance . . .  
About him the cousin of Aeolus-Hippotades  
wrapped a long robe, and laid him out on clean  
fabrics. Then he concerned himself to build  
a pyre for the dead man: long branches he  
gathered,  
and kindling . . .

Ibid. fr. 64b

. . . battle . . .  
For a city is greatly en[hanced]  
when God bestows blessings upon it:  
there's no prestige or attainment for mortals  
beyond the divine allocation. A very clear sign  
. . . and of fighting . . .



## Stesichorus

*The Song of Geryon*: this poem related one of the major exploits of Heracles, the capture of Geryon's cattle. Geryon or Geryones was a winged monster with three heads, six arms, and six legs, the son of Chrysaor and the nymph Callirhoe. He lived in the far west, on the island of Erythea (probably Cadiz).

184 *Tarshish river*: the Guadalquivir.

185 *the son of Zeus took his way*: to reach Erythea Heracles commandeered the golden bowl in which, according to some poets (cf. Mimnermus 12), the Sun travels at night round Oceanus, the river that encircles the earth, to get back to the east.

181 *Pholos*: a Centaur with whom Heracles stayed as he passed through the mountains of Arcadia. The smell of the wine, never previously opened, attracted other, aggressive Centaurs, whom Heracles had to drive away.

*Palinodes*: many authors mention a 'Palinode' of Stesichorus in which he retracted what he had previously related about Helen—the usual story that she had eloped to Troy with Paris—and presented a version in which the gods removed her to Egypt for the duration of the Trojan War and duped Paris and everyone else with a phantom Helen. It was said that the goddess Helen had struck Stesichorus blind because of his first account, which did her no credit, and that on composing the Palinode he recovered his sight. One source states that there were two separate Palinodes.

*Eriphyle*: the poem presumably related how Alcmaeon killed his mother Eriphyle to avenge his father, the seer Amphiaraus, whom she had compelled to take part in a war that he knew would bring his death. Adrastus was Eriphyle's brother.

209 This fragment comes from an account of Telemachus' visit to Sparta to seek news of his father, adapted from book 15 of the *Odyssey*.

217 *this bow*: it was given so that Orestes could defend himself against the Furies when they pursued him because of his murder of his mother.

219 The dream was Clytemnestra's. The serpent represents Agamem-



non, whom she killed (in one version) with an axe. The king that appeared 'out of that' (or perhaps 'after that') is presumably Orestes. Pleisthenes in some traditions replaced Atreus as Agamemnon's father. So the point may be that the legitimate king was to regain the throne from the usurper Aegisthus.

*The Hunters of the Boar:* heroes from many parts of Greece assembled to help Meleager hunt the mighty boar that the goddess Artemis sent to ravage the land of Calydon. The sons of Thestios were Meleager's uncles.

*The Sons of Oedipus:* Oedipus having laid curses upon his two sons Polynices and Eteocles, the seer Teiresias has prophesied to Jocasta that they will kill each other. She tries to prevent this by arranging that her sons should separate and rule Thebes in alternation. So Polynices departs. He went to Argos and there married the daughter of the king Adrastus. Later, when Eteocles proved unwilling to cede the Theban throne, Polynices tried with Adrastus' support to return and seize it by force. The two brothers duly killed one another in the battle.

223 *deserters of their men:* Tyndareos' three daughters were Timandra, who left her husband Echemos for another man; Clytemnestra, who was unfaithful to Agamemnon; and Helen, who deserted Menelaus when she sailed away with Paris.

P. Oxy. 3876 fr. 4 *daughter of Thestios:* Althaea. When the Calydonian Boar was killed, Meleager gave its hide to Atalanta, whom he fancied. His uncles, Althaea's brothers, took it away from her, and in a rage he killed them. The subject of the following fragment is obscure.